

UPDATE

Lincoln's Pandemic Flu Planning Efforts as of March 31, 2006

All updates posted are summaries of recent activities undertaken and future events planned in preparation for the possibility of a pandemic flu (a worldwide outbreak of strain of flu that no one has immunity to) affecting Lincoln and Lancaster County. The status of Lincoln's Pandemic Flu Planning Efforts from November 2005 through March 10th, 2006, with an overview to date may be found at <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/health/data/flu/CurrentStatus.pdf>. In addition to providing periodic updates, we are adding a listing of community and regional partners who have participated in our planning efforts to this point. As planning proceeds, the list of partners will be updated.

Overview of the Need to Plan for Pandemic Flu

- A recent strain of avian flu or "bird flu" emerged in China in 1997. It has infected both wild and domestic birds and now has spread to birds on three continents: Asia, Europe and Africa. Millions of birds have been killed by the disease or through culling to stop the spread of the disease. Also, this particular strain of bird flu, named "influenza A (H5N1)" is known to have infected at least 200 humans as well as a number of other mammals such as tigers, cats, and pigs.
- While there are only a relatively small number of human cases of bird-to-human transmission of H5N1, and an even smaller number of cases probably spread from one person to another, there is no easy spread of the disease from human-to-human.
- However, the situation leads to the potential for this strain or another strain of avian flu to mutate or undergo a genetic shift. Should such a genetic shift result in a new strain of flu that's easily transmissible from human to human, a pandemic flu may be one possible result. In this case, it is likely that no one in the world would have immunity to this new or novel strain of flu virus.
- Three pandemic flu outbreaks occurred in the last century, with the 1918 flu being the most severe. The 1957 and 1968 outbreaks were less severe, but they, too, caused high numbers of people to get ill, and many died from the flu. Most experts believe that it is only a matter of time until there is another pandemic and that preparation could potentially save many lives and lessen the spread of disease and suffering.
- The impact of a pandemic flu on Lincoln could be dramatic in terms of illness (morbidity), economic and social disruptions: and, even, in terms of the number of deaths (mortality). Or, the impact could be milder than in past pandemics. In either case, preparation is essential to whatever we can to lessen the negative impact on our community and the villages and towns in the county.
- A pandemic, by definition, is worldwide. Therefore, we cannot expect that there would be much outside help from the federal or state government. Since that would most likely be the case, it is up to local leaders to plan

plans about what we can do to help ourselves. The federal government has provided funding to the state and, in turn, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services will be awarding local public health departments funding to plan for a pandemic event.

- Furthermore, it is unlikely that a vaccine for a new human flu for could be available for at least six or nine months, maybe even not for a year after the first cases are recognized. Because it may not be Influenza A (H5N1) that causes the worldwide flu epidemic, vaccines that are now being developed against H5N1 may not be effective against whatever pandemic flu emerges. As for treatment of the disease, there's also no assurance that antiviral medications, such as Tamiflu and Relenza, which can help reduce the effects of seasonal flu, will be effective against a new flu virus.
- Every agency in the City of Lincoln, every healthcare provider, every business and every individual needs to think about the steps that would need to be taken in the event a pandemic flu here in Lincoln. Many agencies and organizations have already begun planning for pandemic flu just as they plan for other emergency situations. We, at the Health Department, strongly recommend that the planning and preparation occur at all levels, for individuals, families and neighborhoods.
- The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department (LLCHD) has the responsibility to plan and prepare for a number of emergencies and disasters, including a pandemic flu. However, just as we prepare for other natural and man-made events, we are not alone, nor do we have the resources to address every need. Therefore, we will collaborate with many community partners in response to a pandemic, should it occur.

Recent Meetings

The Health Department's Director, Assistant Director, Environmental Public Health Division Manager, Health Data and Evaluation Division Manager and Communicable Disease Program Supervisor have been meeting with the various subcommittees on pandemic flu planning. One or more of this group has met with all of the subcommittees representing the core public and private infrastructure of our community. The most recent meetings have been with members of the Nebraska Grocer's Association, Lincoln Independent Business Association (LIBA) and the Chamber of Commerce as representatives of the business community. LIBA and the Chamber have helped distribute the business checklist to their members. A meeting was also held with school nurses from the Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) and they shared the information with LPS administration. As a result of the discussion, LPS has created a Pandemic Flu Planning Committee that met on March 29th for the first time. This group plans to meet every two weeks through the end of the school year.

The next meeting of the subcommittee representing local healthcare providers is scheduled for April 4th. A meeting date for representatives of the faith community and the City Mission is being explored and will be held in early April. There are other groups who also need to be brought into our planning efforts. More

meetings between LLCHD and our other community partners are being scheduled, and the progress we make will be documented on our webpage.

Presentations and Community Meetings

Each meeting broadens the awareness of members and informs everyone about new issues to discuss and new partners to bring to the table. The spread of avian flu (H5N1) and the severity of the virus when it infects humans, has also received a great deal of attention in the scientific community and in the media. As a result the demand for local presentations about pandemic flu has also increased. Nurses from the Communicable Disease Program held three internal presentations to LLCHD staff in February and March. The PowerPoint presentation we used was prepared by the University of Nebraska Medical Center's (UNMC) Center for Biopreparedness Education and may be found online at <http://bioprep.org/avian-flu-classes.htm>. We are recommending that this presentation be widely used in our community in order to give a consistent message to all. In addition to the internal presentations, the Director, Assistant Director and other LLCHD spokespersons have been interviewed on radio and on Channel 5, the City's public access station. The Director met with the Human Services Federation on March 28th. Plans are underway for continued discussions with these and other agencies and organizations to make plans and prepare for a pandemic as it might affect everyone, but especially vulnerable population groups within the community.

Arrangements are being made to schedule four community forums in the time periods between now and late summer. As they are scheduled they will be publicized on this site and through other avenues. We anticipate there will be other presentations scheduled with interested groups and organizations, and community partners as the preparation and planning progresses. (There are several requests that we recently received at 402/441-8053 that we have not added to the list, but that we will try to accommodate.)

Additionally, there are other community or group presentations scheduled. More details, locations and times, will be shared as they approach:

- April 4th from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.—“Bird Flu: Panic or Prepare,” a presentation sponsored by Volunteer Partners at Culler Middle School, 5201 Vine.
- April 11th—Mayor Seng's Town Hall meeting.
- April 18th and 19th—Lincoln Electric System Safety meetings.
- May 15th at 8:00 p.m.—presentation to the Mutual Aid Society at Panama Fire and Rescue.
- May 17th—11:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m., a presentation to WorkWell representatives at their meeting. Details will be forthcoming to WorkWell members.

The University of Nebraska Medical Center is also hosting a Mini-Medical school teleconference entitled “Avian Flu: Ready or Not” on April 13th and 20th, with one

of the sites being the Dental College in Lincoln. More information and online registration can be found at <http://www.unmc.edu/minimed/avianflu/index.htm>.

Other Strategic Issues

In conjunction with the other activities, HDE staff members have prepared a new draft ordinance on quarantine and isolation, which is being reviewed by the City's and County's Legal staffs. Quarantine and isolation, as well as "social distancing" (closing events and schools, self isolation) will be part of the strategy to reduce the spread on pandemic flu should it occur. Individuals and families need to be prepared to shelter in place in their homes, and information is available for stockpiling food, and necessary supplies at www.pandemicflu.gov or at www.ready.gov.

While it's true that all pandemic flu planning is local, the federal government has provided some excellent checklists for individuals and groups to think about as they plan. These checklists are for individuals, families, businesses, governments, schools and child care providers, the faith community and community organizations and for specific types of health care providers (e.g., EMS, medical offices, home-healthcare providers). The checklists can be found at www.pandemicflu.gov , but we have also made a link to the checklists, in .pdf format, to reduce the navigation to them.

We seek input and questions from individuals about avian flu and the potential for a pandemic flu. As we receive questions we will answer them and update the FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) on our webpage. Please contact us at epi@ci.lincoln.ne.gov or call us 402-441-8053.